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Videophones make job search process easier for people who are deaf

MONTGOMERY – With the economy ailing, finding a job has become more difficult.

For people who are deaf, it can be an even bigger challenge.

To address that, the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) has placed “videophones” at the Career Center in Montgomery and 10 other cities throughout the state to connect job-seekers who are deaf with ADRS interpreters.

“These videophones level the playing field for people who are deaf by providing equal access to career center services,” said Melvin Walker, ADRS staff interpreter.

Before the videophones were made available, Walker said, people who are deaf would sometimes have to wait days – or even weeks– before receiving services at a career center.

Now these individuals can get assistance immediately by contacting interpreters through the videophones.

In addition to the convenience to the deaf, the new systems save time and travel money for ADRS staff.

From their office, interpreters assist consumers in interacting with career center staff to complete a resume, look for a job, or participate in a job workshop.

In Montgomery, an interpreter is available Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. until 4 p.m.

The department’s eight staff interpreters take turns serving as the career center “interpreter of the day” for each of the 11 career centers throughout the state.

ADRS staff installed the devices and trained the career center staff on using them and on interacting with people who are deaf.

The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs was instrumental in obtaining the U.S. Department of Labor grant that provided the funding for the videophones and equipment. Additional funds also came from the Council for Developmental Disabilities.

ADRS Deputy Commissioner Jim Carden said the success of the initiative is a direct result of the strong collaboration among the various agencies.

“This is another good example of how Alabamians with disabilities benefit when state agencies and community organizations work together,” he said. “In this case, these videophones will be another key to open the doors to independence for our consumers who are deaf and seeking employment.”

The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services is the state agency whose mission is to enable Alabama’s children and adults with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential.